



Massachusetts
Department
of
ENVIRONMENTAL
PROTECTION

fact sheet

Commercial and Office Recycling

This fact sheet provides an overview of issues to consider when establishing a recycling program for the workplace. Understanding the costs and benefits of recycling will help you develop a plan that is effective and attractive to staff and management.

Why should businesses consider recycling?

In Massachusetts there are “waste bans”, which are restrictions on the disposal, transfer for disposal and contracting for disposal of certain hazardous and recyclable items at solid waste facilities in Massachusetts. Business managers should remove and recycle any banned materials they generate or run the risk that waste loads will be rejected at a disposal site, charged an additional handling fee or face potential enforcement penalties. Recycling at businesses can be easier and more economical than recycling at home, because the materials are generated in larger quantities and are easier to keep separate from the rest of the trash. Recycling prevents unnecessary disposal of usable raw materials, saves energy and reduces air and water pollution. Recycling can also reduce disposal costs and can save businesses money by diverting materials from the trash dumpster to the recycling bin.

Each year in the Commonwealth, more than three million tons of solid waste is collected from businesses, institutions and industry. This represents approximately one half of the total solid waste stream.

Because recycling reduces disposal costs, recycling programs in municipal offices, schools and businesses are often less expensive than disposing of materials as waste. Recycling is an opportunity to gain valuable recognition in the eyes of both employees and customers.

What types of workplace or commercial recycling programs can be created?

- *Institutions:* In addition to basic recycling programs for paper, bottles and cans, food waste composting programs have been implemented in many institutional cafeterias. Some of these programs have replaced polystyrene trays and plastic utensils with ones that are biodegradable. Yard waste composting programs also are important to institutions that have large grounds and to public park managers as well.
- *Manufacturers:* By reducing waste and minimizing the use of raw materials, manufacturers can keep their costs down and sell their products at competitive prices. Manufacturers can recycle cardboard, wood pallets and office paper, as well as materials specific to their own manufacturing processes.
- *Office Buildings:* Many offices, including municipal offices, schools and commercial buildings, recycle mixed office paper and cardboard. Beverage containers with and without a five-cent deposit value also are often collected. Custodial staff can be assigned to manage these recycling programs.
- *Restaurants:* Restaurants can use beverage container deposits as leverage to attract recycling services for non-deposit food and beverage containers. Collecting used cooking grease and oil for rendering is commonplace in restaurants. Some restaurants have established relationships with local pig farmers or composters to remove fresh food scraps. Restaurants have strong incentives to avoid disposal because they often use smaller dumpsters to conserve space, and pay for more frequent pick-ups of waste.

- *Retail Businesses:* Most retailers flatten cardboard boxes to save space in their dumpsters and reduce collection costs. Recycling cardboard adds just a few more steps. In addition, appliance stores have found that taking away old appliances is a valuable service to consumers, and allows them to broker enough of the material to sell it to scrap metal dealers.

How do I make a recycling program cost effective?

Start any recycling program by looking at what materials you throw away. Identify the materials that you generate in the largest quantities and determine if any of these are recyclable in your area. Once you have targeted the materials most appropriate for your own recycling program, the next step is to call vendors and compare the costs and benefits of their services. Recyclable materials have a value - otherwise the mills would not want them. But the value may not always cover the costs of the recycler's time, transportation and equipment. For the commercial manager, that means creating a balance between price and service.

Some recycling vendors specialize in high-volume, low-service accounts, for which they pay cash for high-value recyclables. Others specialize in providing a higher level of service and may charge a fee. Typically, manufacturing plants and print shops choose high-volume dealers, while high-rise offices choose higher levels of service (or contract those services separately to custodial managers). Look for a recycler who has an established route in your area, so he can justify mileage over several accounts.

What is the market value of my recyclables?

The price you pay to have someone pick up your recyclable material depends on the market for that material. The following sources provide information on recycling markets:

- The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's web page on pricing information at: www.epa.gov/jtr/comm/pricing.htm.
- The Official Board Markets ("*The Yellow Sheet*") - a weekly periodical filled with news and prices of recyclable commodities. For subscription information call (888) 527-7008 or visit the web site at: www.packaging-online.com.

How will recycling affect my handling costs?

Depending on the service you negotiate, recycling can add to or subtract from your custodial hours. Do not compare floor-by-floor collections with loading dock collections solely on the basis of price. If you do not have the time to carry materials to the loading dock, a high-service recycler that will collect floor-by-floor may be worth paying for.

How much space will recycling require?

The volume of a material that a recycling vendor gets from a single trip makes a difference in his or her earnings. It also affects your storage space needs. Before calling vendors, decide where you will store recyclables between pick-ups. Negotiating a minimum pick-up is often more important than negotiating over pennies per pound. Also remember to credit recycling with the space the material takes up in your dumpster. If you can reduce the frequency of rubbish pickups or the number of dumpsters you need, the avoided disposal costs can be significant.

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How will the recycling program look?

Plan around the aesthetic, as well as functional, needs of your office. You will need indoor bins in convenient areas, which will probably be visible to staff and customers. The indoor bins will most likely be emptied into larger collection containers that are stored out of sight of your customers. If you request that your vendor supply all of these containers, the price for recycling service may be affected. Do not assume that a vendor will leave containers that fit your office decor.

Where can I find more information about recycling in Massachusetts?

If you do need more assistance, try the following sources:

- Massachusetts Waste Ban Guidance:
<http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/wstban01.doc>
- Solid Waste and Recycling Service Provider Directory.
Available on the Earth911business.com web page: www.earth911business.com
- Free Technical Assistance through the Massachusetts WasteWise program:
<http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/wastewise.htm>
- Donation and Reuse: <http://www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/donation.htm>
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Reuse web page:
<http://www.epa.gov/newengland/assistance/reuse/index.html>
- Recycling Services Directory and Markets Guide.
Available on the DEP web page: www.mass.gov/dep/recycle/reduce/mktdev.htm
- Check your yellow pages for listings under Junk, Recycling Centers, Recycling Services, Redemption Centers, Rubbish, Scrap Metal, Waste Hauling, or Waste Paper